

Section 2

The Beginnings of Islam

Prepare to Read

Objectives

In this section you will

1. Learn about the Arabian Peninsula, its nomadic people, and its centers of trade.
2. Find out about the life and mission of the Muslim prophet Muhammad.
3. Learn about Muslim beliefs.

Taking Notes

As you read this section, keep track of the most important ideas about the beginnings of Islam. Copy the outline started below, and add to it as you read.

- I. The Arabian Peninsula
 - A. Nomadic Bedouins
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - B. Mecca: A center of trade



Target Reading Skill

Preview and Predict

Making predictions about your text helps you set a purpose for reading and remember what you read. Before you begin, look at the headings, photos, and anything else that stands out. Then predict what the text might be about. For example, you might predict that this section will tell about the origins of Muslim beliefs. As you read, if what you learn doesn't support your prediction, revise your prediction.

Key Terms

- **Muhammad** (muh HAM ud) *n.* the prophet and founder of Islam
- **nomads** (NOH madz) *n.* people with no permanent home, who move from place to place in search of food, water, or pasture
- **caravan** (KA ruh van) *n.* a group of traders traveling together for safety
- **Mecca** (MEK uh) *n.* an Arabian trading center and Muhammad's birthplace
- **Muslim** (MUZ lum) *n.* a follower of Islam
- **mosque** (mahsk) *n.* a Muslim house of worship
- **Quran** (KOO RAHN) *n.* the holy book of Islam



In this miniature painting, an angel's announcement is symbolized by the blowing of a horn.

The religion of Islam (IS lahm) teaches that in about 610, the prophet Muhammad (muh HAM ud) went into a cave in the Arabian mountains to pray. (A prophet is a person who is regarded as speaking for God.) It is said that while Muhammad was inside the cave, he heard the voice of an angel. God told Muhammad through the angel that there was only one God, that God had created people, and that God would teach His people. The angel told Muhammad that Muhammad was to be God's messenger.

According to Islamic teaching, Muhammad was frightened and unsure that he was worthy of such an important mission. But he obeyed. God continued to send Muhammad messages, which Muhammad shared with the people of the Arabian Peninsula. These teachings became a religion that brought great changes to the region. And in the centuries after Muhammad's death, the new religion spread to many parts of the world.

The Arabian Peninsula

In Muhammad's time, as today, much of the Arabian Peninsula was covered by desert. Although surrounded by water, the peninsula has no major rivers and receives little rainfall. Trade with neighboring peoples supported the growth of towns along trade routes. And many groups of Bedouins (BED oo inz) made their homes among the shifting sand dunes of the desert.

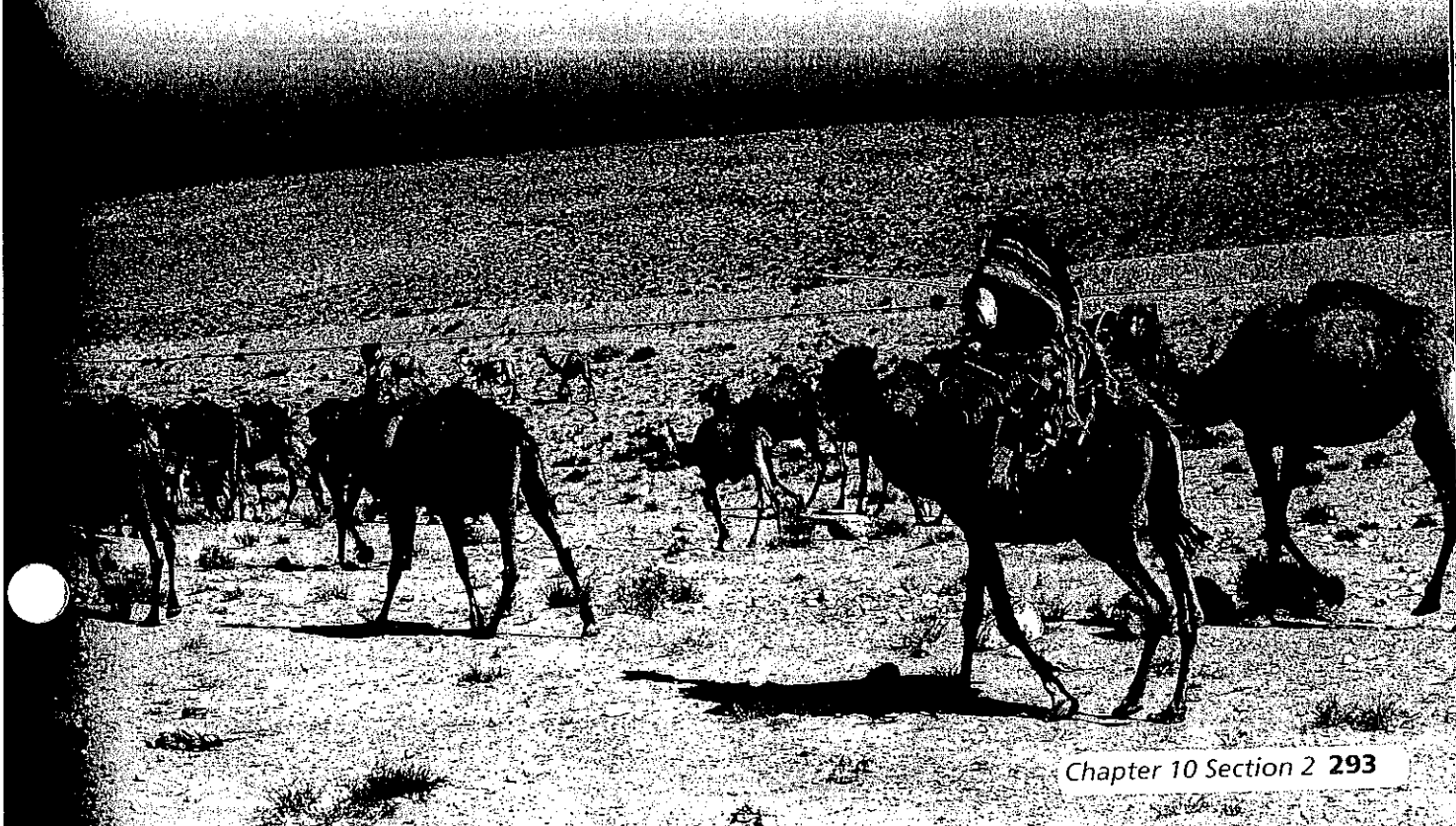
Nomadic Bedouins The Bedouins were nomads, or people who have no permanent home but move from place to place in search of food, water, and pasture. The Arabian desert yielded little food for the Bedouins or for their herds of sheep, camels, and goats. Water was also scarce—for people as well as for animals.

To make their way across the desert, the Bedouins followed traditional routes from one oasis to another. An oasis is a green area within a desert, fed by underground water. These all-important oases provided plenty of water for the nomads and their animals.

Because of their knowledge of the desert and its oases, the Bedouins also worked as guides for traders. They helped traders travel across the desert in large groups called caravans. These desert caravans depended on camels, which carried both people and their goods. Camels are sturdy animals with a special ability to store water for long periods.

Bedouins Today

These Bedouins in the Sinai desert of Egypt are still nomads like their ancestors. **Predict** What kinds of events and conditions might prevent the Bedouins from continuing their traditional way of life?





Links to Economics

New Business Methods

From 750 to 1350, Muslims like the Arab traders shown above dominated the trade routes in Arabia and far beyond. They not only found new goods to trade, they also developed new ways to trade. Muslim merchants bought and sold goods on credit and set up locations for exchanging currency. To avoid carrying large sums of cash across thousands of miles, they developed a way to transfer money from one location to another—a forerunner to today's checks. Merchants could deposit funds at one location and use a letter of credit to withdraw those funds at a different location.

Mecca: A Center of Trade The oases on the Arabian Peninsula became busy trading centers. One of the most important was Mecca (MEK uh). From Mecca, great caravans traveled northwest to markets in what is now Syria. From Syria, goods could be shipped across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. Other caravans traveled northeast from Mecca. They made a dangerous journey across the desert to markets in the area now known as Iraq. Trade was also conducted with Yemen to the south. Precious goods traded along these routes included perfume and spices, incense, expensive cloth, elephant tusks, and gold.

✓ **Reading Check** Why did Bedouins make good guides for traders?

The Prophet Muhammad

Muhammad was born and grew up in the trading center of Mecca. His great-grandfather had been a wealthy merchant. However, by the time Muhammad was born in about 570, his family was poor. As a young man, Muhammad worked on caravans. His job took him to distant places, including Syria, which was then part of the Byzantine Empire.

Muhammad's Mission Muhammad liked to walk in the mountains outside Mecca. Troubled by problems he saw in society, he liked to be alone to pray and think. When Muhammad was 40 years old, he first heard God speak to him through the angel in the cave. God told him that people would submit to, or agree to obey, the one true God. In time, a person who accepted the teachings of Muhammad came to be known as a **Muslim** (MUZ lum), "a person who submits." The religion of Muslims is called Islam.

Muhammad preached God's message—that all people were brothers and sisters in a community established by God—but few people in Mecca listened. They thought Muhammad's teachings threatened their old gods. They feared that abandoning their old gods would end Mecca's importance as a religious center. Many Arabs traveled to Mecca in order to pray at an ancient shrine called the Kaaba (KAH buh). People in Mecca also feared that Muhammad might gain political power.

Muhammad in Medina In 622, Muhammad and his followers were invited to Yathrib (yah THREEEB), a city north of Mecca. The people there regarded Muhammad as a prophet. This movement of early Muslims is known as the hijra (hih JY ruh), or “the migration.” The year of the hijra—622 in the calendar used in the United States—became year 1 on the Muslim calendar.

After the hijra, the name of Yathrib was changed to Medina. This name means “city” and is short for “city of the prophet.” Medina quickly became an important Islamic center. But Islam did not remain limited to Medina. In 630, Muhammad returned to Mecca—this time in triumph. By the time Muhammad died two years later, the new religion of Islam had spread all across the Arabian Peninsula.

Reading Check Why did Muhammad go to Yathrib?

Muslim Belief

A muezzin (myoo EZ in), a man who calls Muslims to worship, looks out over the city and begins his loud call. The muezzin’s voice goes in all directions: “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.” In Arabic, the word for God is *Allah*. Five times each day, Muslims are called to worship in this way. And five times a day, every faithful Muslim stops whatever he or she is doing to pray.

Some Muslims gather in a house of worship called a **mosque** (mahsk). Others kneel outside.

Wherever Muslims are in the world—in the Arabian Peninsula, in North Africa, or in the United States—they kneel in a direction that faces toward Mecca. “There is no god but God,” the faithful respond, “and Muhammad is the messenger of God.”

The Five Pillars of Islam Basic Muslim beliefs are expressed in the Five Pillars of Islam. These practices, shown in the table above, are the foundations of Islam. Muslims regard these pillars as sacred duties. The fifth pillar—the hajj (haj), or pilgrimage to the Kaaba—is required only of those who are able to travel to Mecca.



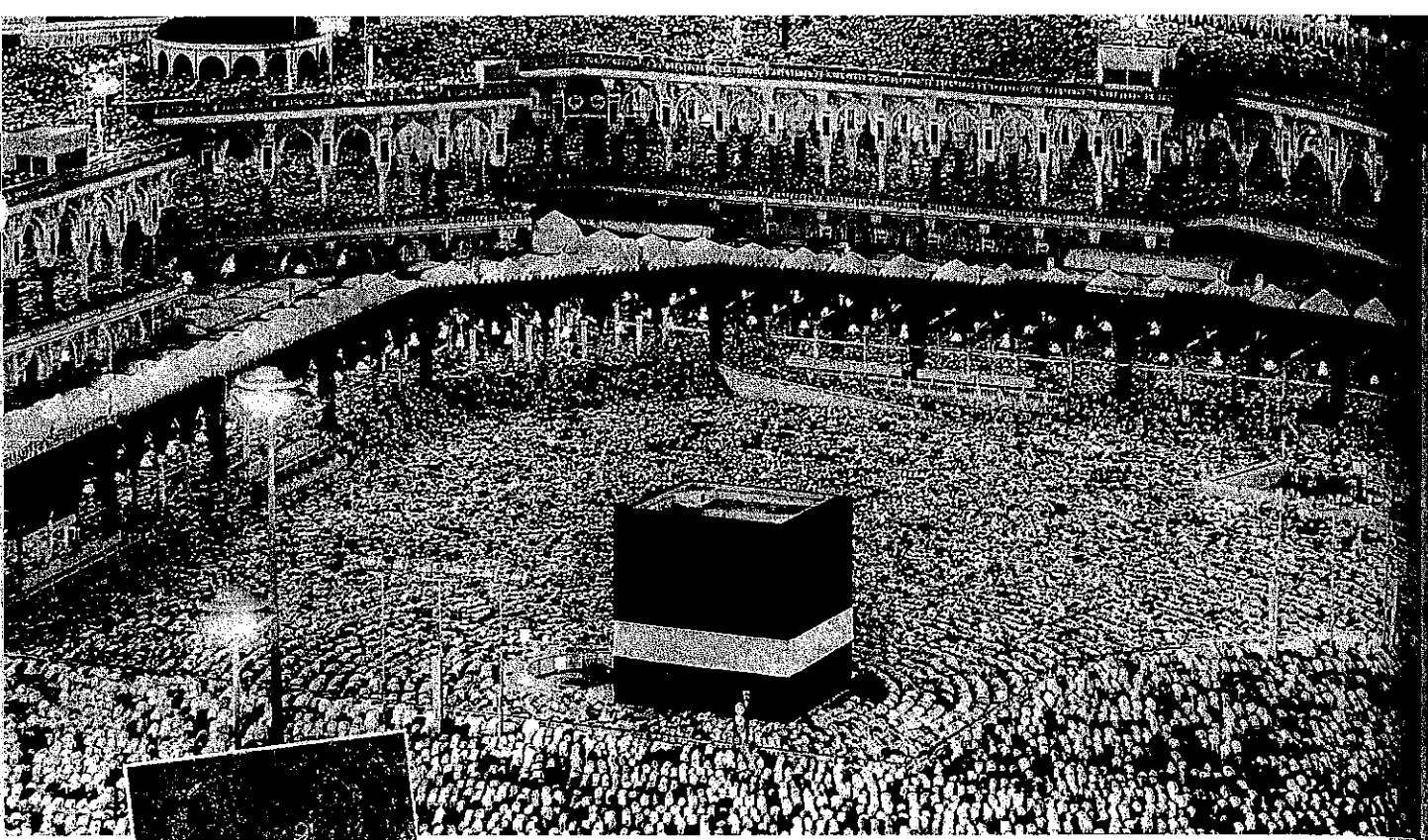
The Five Pillars of Islam

Pillar	Description
Declaration of Faith	Muslims must regularly declare the belief that there is only one God and Muhammad is God’s messenger.
Prayer	Muslims must pray five times each day, facing in the direction of the holy city of Mecca.
Almsgiving	Muslims must give alms, or money that goes to the needy.
Fasting	Muslims must fast during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan.
Pilgrimage	Muslims must make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least one time in their lives if they are able.

Chart Skills

The photo above shows Muslim men and boys worshiping at a mosque in Brunei, in Southeast Asia. **Identify** Which pillar of Islam are they fulfilling?

Analyze Information Which one of the five pillars would it be most difficult to fulfill? Explain why.



The Hajj

Muslims making a hajj to the Kaaba wear special white, seamless garments. The large photo shows a modern hajj. The small painting is from a 1410 manuscript. **Compare** What can you conclude about this tradition by comparing the two pictures?



Preview and Predict

Based on what you have read so far, is your prediction on target? If not, revise or change your prediction now.

The Quran The holy book of Islam is called the Quran (koo RAHN). It contains the messages God revealed to Muhammad, including the rules of Islam. Many Muslims have memorized the Quran. Muslims believe that the meaning and beauty of the Quran are best appreciated in its original language. Therefore, many converts to Islam learn Arabic. This shared language has helped unite Muslims from many regions.

Like the Torah (TOH ruh), the Jewish holy book, and the Christian Bible, the Quran contains many kinds of writing, including stories, promises, warnings, and instructions. There is a reason for the similarity of the Quran to Jewish and Christian holy books. Muslims, like Jews and Christians, believe in one God. They regard Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses as important people in their religious history. Muhammad saw himself as the last prophet in a long line of prophets that included all these men. Muhammad felt respect for Jews and Christians, whom he called "people of the Book."

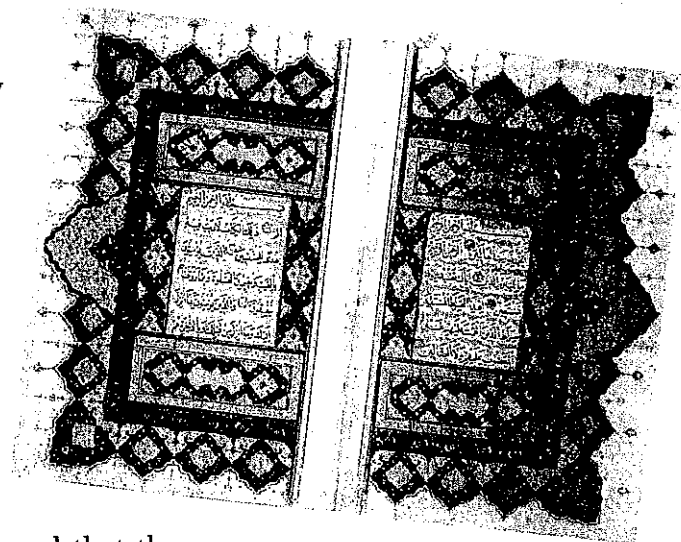
The Role of Women Before Islam, in most of Arab society, women were not regarded as equal to men, and female children were not valued. The Quran, however, taught that men and women were spiritually equal. It also gave women more rights under the law, such as the right to inherit property and to get an education. Muslim women could not be forced to marry against their will, and they had the right to divorce.

A Split Among Muslims You have already read about a schism that split the Christian church at the time of the Byzantine Empire. A schism, or split, also occurred among followers of Islam.

In 656, Uthman (OOTH mahn), the leader of the Muslim community, was assassinated. His death split the Muslim world in two. Muslims disagreed over who should be their rightful leader. Over the next several decades, two main groups gradually emerged on opposite sides of this disagreement.

The smaller group, called Shiites (SHEE yts), argued that the ruler should be a man who was a direct descendant of Muhammad. They believed that Muhammad's descendants would be inspired by God, just as Muhammad had been. They felt that their leader should explain the meanings of the messages Muhammad received from God, which are found in the Quran.

The larger group, called Sunnis (SOO neez), argued that any truly religious Muslim man of Muhammad's tribe could lead the community. They believed that no one man, not even the leader of Islam, should tell Muslims what God's messages meant. The Sunnis argued that a group of Muslim scholars could best explain the Quran. Today, about 85 percent of all Muslims are Sunnis.



Illustrated manuscript pages from a 1500s Quran

Reading Check What issues split the Shiites and Sunnis?

Section 2 Assessment

Key Terms

Review the key terms at the beginning of this section. Use each term in a sentence that explains its meaning.

Target Reading Skill

What did you predict about this section? How did your prediction guide your reading?

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

1. (a) **Note** What geographic feature covers most of the Arabian Peninsula?

(b) **Identify Effects** How did geography affect trade and settlement there?

(c) **Conclude** Why do you think the Bedouins became nomads?

2. (a) **Recall** What were the main events of Muhammad's life?

(b) **Synthesize** What are the main beliefs of Islam?

(c) **Compare and Contrast** What beliefs do Sunnis and Shiites share? Which beliefs separate them?

Writing Activity

Write a poem or a paragraph describing what it might have been like to travel in a caravan. How would it feel to ride a camel? To cross the desert? To stop for a rest at an oasis?

Writing Tip Review the illustrations in this section. Then think about the sights, sounds, and smells you would expect to experience as part of caravan life. Use vivid descriptive words and phrases to describe what you see and feel.